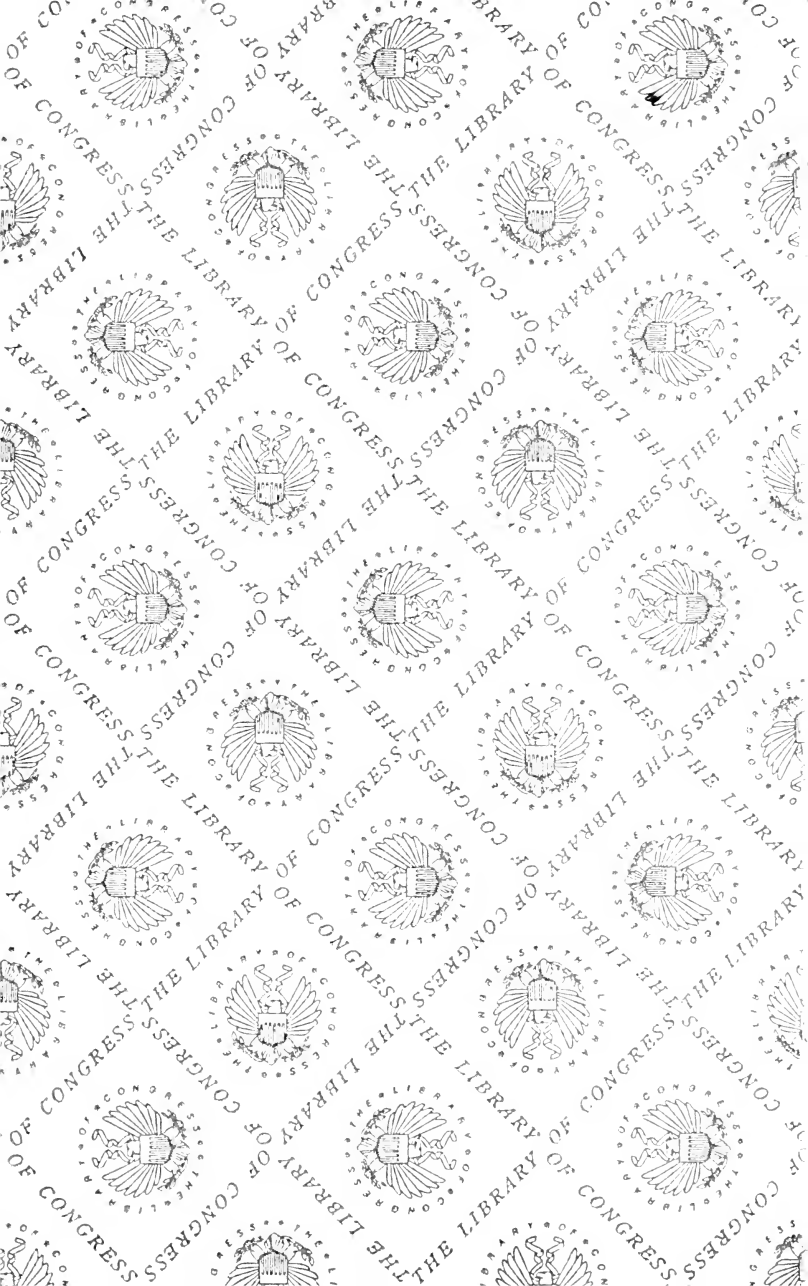
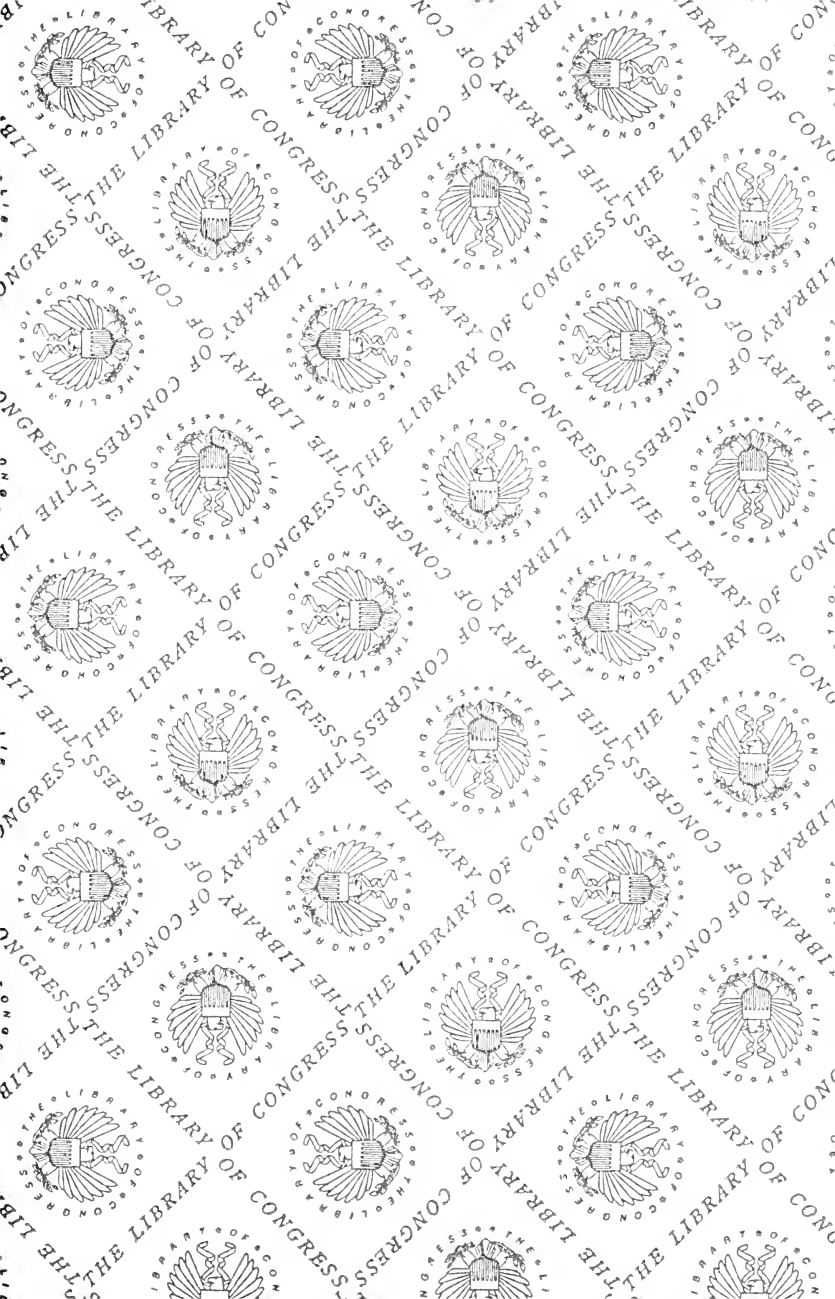


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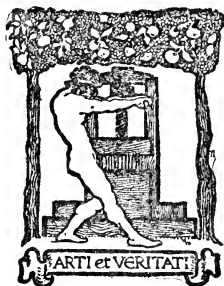




JUSTIFICATION

A Philosophic Phantasy

JOHN H. WHITE



RICHARD G. BADGER

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JUSTIFICATION

A Philosophic Phantasy



INVOCATION

O! Spirit of Poesy, bruised by the cage
Devised for thy lodge by a Mammon-ruled
age,

A kind hand, though rude, strikes the strings
of thy lute,

And prays but a note from thy lips pale and
mute.

O! Lend to my numbers, inconstant and crude,
One tone to betoken thy sanctioning mood,
Though it be but to quicken the sad strings to
throb

With the echoing pulse of a languishing sob.



PRELUDE

A tale so strange I hesitate to tell,
Because I fear you'll say, " 'twas but a dream ";
But if it was a dream, then whence befell
My tattered, miry clothes? And can you deem
That while I slept, the lacerating spines
Intruded, unobserved, my smarting flesh?
Then, too, the boy's narration — but my lines,
If fact or dream, give worthy theme for you
to dream afresh.



CANTO FIRST

The Incantation

I

The eye of Ursa scarce had quailed
Before the purple shafts that paled
The east when, with my prattling child,
I left the town and trod the wild,
Familiar path that deftly wound
To where the verdant mountain, crowned
With stately cedars, slowly rose,
A laggard from a night's repose,
Above the mists that round it spread,
Like downy covers of a bed.

An hour of rugged, healthful toil
 Achieved the crest, and there the soil
 Held forth a sumptuous array
 Of treasures for our holiday;
 The cedar groves were interspersed
 With sun-kissed glades where, gently nursed
 By moss, the pinks and bluets vied
 To have their dewy faces dried
 In the slant rays of welcome light
 That broke the mystic spell of night;
 The dog-wood trees, as if in play,
 Strewed snowy petals in our way;
 While farther on the fancy sped
 Down unfrequented paths that led
 Through fragrant spruce and hemlock dells
 Where columbine and immortelles
 And staid arbutus smiled and sighed
 In every nook where sunshine pried:
 It was a place where one might find
 The balm to soothe a wounded mind,
 For poignant care must here give place
 To melancholy, and all trace
 Of melancholy soon must be
 But an unpainful reverie.

Through kindred scenes we rambled on,
Until the noon had come and gone,
Then, resting on a sheltered ledge,
We willingly redeemed a pledge
To hunger, while our discourse led
To gnomes and fairies, till we spread
A luster of romance around
Each riven rock and mossy mound.
At length the boy, with glance acute,
Said, "Father, are the fairies mute
" In these dull days; and are they chained
" Within the mountain and restrained
" By the great wizard that you now
" Named Science; or do they still bow
" Before their queen and romp and play
" Upon the turf when the last ray
" Of daylight has resigned the wood?
" Do they still meet, in merry mood,
" To weave their May-poles, dance and sing,
" Cut capers queer, and sway, and swing,
" And naughtily confound the wight
" Who ventures near their fire-fly light?"

I answered, " Child, I scarcely know;
" But I recall that long ago
" I sat, a child, where you do now,
" And heard my father tell me how
" His grandsire, many years before,
" Had told him that who-e'er would pour,
" Upon the fist-shaped rock which lies
" Just where that crooked pathway dies,
" A glass of water from the spring
" That issues from its base, and sing
" These mystic words would surely see
" All that a rock could show to such as he."

“ O! Hard hand of Greed that hast stifled, so
long,
“ The spirit of Beauty and Freedom and Song,
“ With thy festering cities, distempered with
trade,
“ Thy pestilent lodgings whence Hope shrinks
dismayed,
“ Thy grindings and grudgings, thy whine and thy
growl,
“ Thy cankering factories, fetid and foul,
“ Where the soul of the toiler is brayed by thy
rasp;
“ O! Hand of the tyrant, unclasp! Unclasp!”

When relish whets the tyro's ear,
To learn, for him, is but to hear;
Scarce thrice repeated was the strain
Before it found complete refrain
From the boy's lips, and soon his hail
Grew faint and fainter, down the trail,
While I sat toying with a fern,
Expectant of his prompt return.

The boy's voice hardly failed the breeze
 Before my mind was ill at ease.
 Our vanity can find no ruse
 Too weak or ludicrous to use —
 Too superficial or too queer —
 When it would make a truce with fear;
 Hence 'twas, my mind, at first, employed
 The pretext to be but annoyed:
 "Plague on his loitering steps," I said,
 "I'll see what mischief claims his head,"
 But quickening pulse and hastening stride
 Betrayed the fear I fain would hide.
 Nor was I long without a cause,
 For a huge pair of murky jaws,
 Born of the clouds, devoured the sun,
 And gave the air that heavy dun
 In which the imps of fury form
 Their swirling ranks to lead the storm;
 And from the nubilous monster's throat
 There came a resonant, raucous note,
 The snarl of a colossal beast
 That fiercely gluts a grewsome feast.
 My fear, now unrestrained, made pace,
 But all too fast, for soon all trace
 Of pathway vanished, and instead,
 A tangled thicket round me spread.

In all the pangs the mind can know,
What can exceed the bitter woe
Of parent fond, whose lapse of care
Has meshed his child in danger's lair?
Reluctantly my thoughts revert
To those dread hours when, fast begirt
By brake and fen that beast would shun,
I struggled to regain my son;
From bog to bush I madly ran,
Too frantic to pursue a plan;
I loudly called the boy by name,
And from the deeper swamp there came
Derisive croakings of the frogs,
As though the tenants of the bogs
Mocked my distraction; slime and ooze
Besmeared my clothes and hid my shoes;
Anon some huge and hideous snake
Retreated slowly through the brake
With darting tongue and glittering eye,
But half disposed to let me by;
A myriad stinging gnats and flies
Tortured my flesh and bleared my eyes;
My clothes, to tatters rent and torn,
Gave scant protection from the thorn
And sedge that bit as though they bore
A sentient craving for my gore.

In heedless frenzy on I rushed,
With waning strength and spirits crushed,
For deeper, deeper in the maze
My staggering feet led, till a haze
O'erspread my vision; but blest hope,
Which lives while it has power to grope
Sustained me, and at length I found
My feet were treading firmer ground;
But scarce a moment ere a root
Of some great tree engaged my foot
And threw me heavily to earth,
While croakings of mordacious mirth
Seemed to pervade the air. I rose,
With painful struggle, to a pose
Erect, and struck, in fancied fray,
The tree that seemed to bar my way;
My trembling knees sank to their fall,
I feebly, vainly tried to crawl,
And then oblivion wrapped me in her pall.

CANTO SECOND

Evolution

IX

A chill that penetrated to the soul,
A cold, gray, slowly dissipating mist,
Bewildered senses struggling to the realm
Of consciousness across a bridge of dreams,
A warming ray of sunshine on my face,
And then I comprehended it was morn.
Soon as my pained flesh would obey my will,
I raised my form sufficiently to find
That I was resting on a tongue of shale
Which thrust itself into a gloomy slough;
Before me lay a dark and stagnant pool —
So dark and stagnant that the hand of fate
Might e'en have written on its vapid face,
“Lifeless remain thou through eternity”;
Yet, as I gazed, my eyes seemed to divine
The presence of a tiny speck, too small
E'en for a microscopic eye to see,
That trembled in a scintillating ray,
Fraught with a message from another sphere;
It hovered, for a moment, in the air;
Then settled on the surface of the pool,
And a faint quiver — a responsive thrill —
Announced the impregnation of a world.

It seemed that countless ages, in their turn,
 Passed in review, before my wondering eyes,
 And ever varying were the dreadful scenes
 Enacted on the realistic stage
 That lay before me: a chaotic mass
 Of squirming, writhing, wriggling creatures,
 scarce

Distinguishable from the medium
 In which they moved, devoid of impulse save
 To shun the strong and to devour the weak,
 Gave place in my attention, by degree,
 To denizens distinct, which ever changed
 In form and habit as they multiplied
 In numbers, and as constantly increased
 In size and strength and cunning, for not one
 Might long exist, save it could safely hide,
 Victoriously fight or swiftly flee.

At length one bold inhabitant arose
 Above the surface, for a moment gazed
 Upon the upper world, then as in pain
 Withdrew; yet perseveringly renewed
 Its efforts to invade the new domain;
 And it was joined by others of its kind,
 Till some, by great persistence, lay, at last,
 Laboriously panting on the shore.

'Twere tedious to your ears, if I should tell
 A hundredth measure of the forms diverse
 Through which the increase of these beings
 passed,

Or give the barest outline of the strife,
 Perpetual and awful, that ensued
 Their advent; let it be enough to say
 That cunning ever triumphed over strength,
 And many a monster of prodigious bulk
 Yielded its carcass to th' enrolling rocks,
 A monument to its fatuity.

The wondrous metamorphosis progressed
 Until one genus banished or subdued
 All others, and I marveled much to see
 How nearly human had the victors grown;
 Save for their dwarfish stature and the long ¹
 And bushy hair that drooped, from beetling
 brows,

Athwart their eyes, thus tempering the light
 To sight that shunned the sun, they might have
 passed,

In proper garb, unnoticed, on our streets:
 Deep was my satisfaction, for I thought
 The sickening horrors now would have an end;
 But futile wish, for in the self-same breath,
 Dissensions rent the new community,
 And once again the welkin groaned with war.

The wars that now convulsed this sad domain
 Were founded on contentions most absurd;
 At first, indeed, the monstrous arrogance
 Of the chief villains hardly deigned excuse
 For their careers of murder and rapine;
 But later it became the shallow vogue
 To throw a sop to conscience by pretence
 Of service to religion, and I saw
 Full many a blood-steeped rogue proclaimed a
 saint.

When that the sanctimonious mask was worn
 So threadbare it would not deceive a babe,
 Hypocrisy devised new artifice
 By sounding in sonorous, brazen tones
 Such terms as "Glory," "Patriot," and
 "Fame,"

Thereby attracting to foul enterprise
 Adventurers and youths who did not know
 The meaning of the words; for few the wars
 In which th' aggressors waged a righteous
 cause;

And always near the root there might be found
 Some blatant dolt, besotted with the dream
 To win the shallow plaudits of his kind,
 And deeper still, the knave who played for pelf.

XIII

Had these proclivities to strife involved
 The welfare only of the hordes who fought,
 With less regret the story might be told;
 But heavily the burden fell on those
 Who labored to support the parasites
 Of court and camp, and to provide the tools
 Of their disgusting trade; the intervals
 Inaptly titled "periods of peace"
 Were e'en but groaning nightmares of distrust,
 Spent in the feverish making of the teeth.
 The teeth! O, that the memory might fade!
 Attachments of most hideous design,
 Made at enormous toil, to fit the jaws
 Like great, protruding fangs, were not alone
 Contrived to tear an adversary's flesh,
 But were provided with peculiar pipes
 That poisoned, and with violence expelled,
 The spittle of the wearers, and gave vent,
 With each discharge, to a most deafening
 noise.

E'en on their fraternizing festivals,
 Absurd as it may seem, it was the rule
 To send a gang of rowdies, thus equipped,
 To fill the functions of an embassy,
 And then the friendly spitting that ensued
 Was scarce more nauseating than the foul
 And fulsome flattery that was exchanged.

The social status of the leading clans
 Was much the same, and I need but describe
 The traits of one in order to portray
 The character approximate of all,
 And to this end, I would again direct
 Your fancy to the erst depicted pool:
 Since first I gazed upon it, this had changed
 In color to a most unsightly hue;
 The basic pigment, truly, was a bright
 And glittering yellow, but it was imbued
 With most abominable filth, and streaked,
 In many places, with a crimson tinge:
 The cause was soon apparent, for by far
 The greater number of the wretched tribe
 Were wallowing and wrestling in the slough.
 Their constant struggling caused the soil to
 void

A yellow substance which they greatly prized;
 The erubescient tinge was due to blood,
 For some had such a passion for the dross
 That none might safely thwart it. As a rule
 The gain was least for those who deepest
 delved;

For 'twas a practice, prevalent though queer,
 For those who could, to climb upon the backs
 Of others, and to hold, with cunning skill,

The vantage, thus secured, to quickly seize
The yellow morsels, soon as they appeared
Upon the surface. There were numbers yoked
To curious platforms, fashioned to support
Less numbers, who directed those beneath;
The findings were avidiously seized
By those above, save for a modicum
Most grudgingly dispensed among the crew
Of waders. This was but the simpler form
Of the invention; the perfected plan
Involved a series of stages raised
In pyramidal fashion, with each tier
Supported by a nether tier of dwarfs,
Each paying tribute to the tier above.

Let it be said, the queer commodity,
 When gained and used in sanitary ways,
 Served many salutary purposes;
 But in the main it worked but to befoul
 Those who possessed it, and the cause was
 clear:

Some vile perversion of the intellect
 Led those above to take a beastly pride
 In casting offal on their kind beneath,
 And as the surface of the pool was thus
 The nethermost receptacle, it grew
 A frightful, putrefying bed of filth:
 It followed, from the universal law
 Of action and reaction, that the fruits
 Of this corruption must be manifest
 In the much valued product of the pond;
 And never was the rule exemplified
 More clearly, for each yellow particle
 Was permeated with impurity,
 E'en as 'twas found and taken from the slough;
 But as it slowly rose from tier to tier
 By devious and dirty routes, it gained
 New nastiness on each successive stage;
 And as the pigmies found their chief delight
 In vulgarly bedizening themselves

With the polluted stuff, it could but be
That when they met, as frequently they did,
For purpose of an emulous display,
The clouds revolted at the sickening stench.

In such an order of society,
 You may infer, affairs political
 Presented but a periscope of fraud
 And despicable, thinly veiled intrigue :
 There was a structure, cumbrous and grotesque,
 That might be fairly termed a replica
 Of the rude pyramid I have described.
 On this were proudly perched the dwarfs who
 made,
 Interpreted and partially enforced
 The guiding rules of conduct for the tribe.
 Great was the rivalry for place on this,
 And most peculiarly was it attained :
 The building was, in its interior plan,
 A labyrinth of winding galleries,
 Dipping to dismal depths, 'ere they again
 Turned upward, intersecting, forking, writhed
 In convolutions intricate; through these
 The skilled aspirants passed, in their advance
 From stage to stage. Your wonder will in-
 crease
 When I relate that, though the tunnel walls
 Were, at their outer termini, of size
 Sufficient to permit the candidates
 To stand erect, they speedily converged
 As they led inward, till the passagers ²

Might go no farther, saving they would crawl
Upon their stomachs; wriggling thus, they
passed

Through secret chambers, tenanted by vile,
Misshapen creatures who at times peered
forth

Through crevasses, or skulked the outer stage
In the deep shadows, but abhorred the sun.
Sometimes these tenants of the under world,
In fierce dispute, unguardedly revealed
A part of the abominable rites
That were performed within the covert dens
When the vermicular solicitant
Presented his petition for their aid;
But lest the narrative offend your ears,
Let it suffice to say that it was not
The depth of his debasement that he placed
His abject neck beneath the scurvy feet
Of the ignoble masters of these haunts;
And when he reached the much desired place
Thus tortuously gained, his every act
Was ordered to the liking of these foul,
Benighted monsters: Yet his fealty
Was seemingly rewarded, for anon
Some stealthy emissary from the pits
Brought bounty that he stealthily received.
My curiosity was keen to know
The nature of the prizes that were bought

At such stupendous cost — What treasure
rare

Could compensate him for the sacrifice
That he had made — till presently, it chanced
That giver and receiver met to make
Their surreptitious transfer, unaware
Of alien eyes, so near me that I saw
The substance that was eagerly received;
And, Pah! 'Twas but the same old gaudery,
And stinking higher than it stank before.

My tale would slander this unhappy race,
 Should I neglect to state the hopeful fact
 That many, in their poor, myopic way,
 Sought, not alone, their own substantial good,
 But tried to lead their fellows from the slough.
 It happened e'en, at times, that one of these
 Attained to high position on the pile
 Devoted to affairs of government:
 This was, for most part, when the pseudo-
 ship
 Was perilously mired, and might move
 To extrication only in a straight
 And simple path that was beyond the ken
 Of those whose serpentine propensities
 Had brought disaster to th' unwieldy craft;
 In this predicament all classes turned —
 Some grudgingly, some gladly — to invest
 The management in one whose trodden path
 Betrayed no sinuous dexterity;
 And though the wrigglers soon regained con-
 trol,
 I fancied that, in some minute degree,
 Their conduct was less shameful than before.

XVIII

Nor were there wanting some whose thoughts
 were turned
To lofty theme and sentiment refined;
I must, indeed, relate how one drew near,
And in the notion that he was alone,
Gave tender passion rhythmical relief
In well voiced song of human sentiment.
In such a state of mind as I had reached,
Naught could amaze me, so I marveled not
To hear him voice his love lay in my tongue;
His words, if memory serves me well, were
 these:

XIX

“ O, happy wind, by fate consigned
“ To court her lustrous tresses
“ And grace her cheek with tints that speak
“ The wealth of thy caresses,
“ If she should sigh when thou art nigh,
“ O, tell her, in replying,
“ Of one in pain who may not deign
“ His heart the stint of sighing.”

XX

“ O, favored moon, that know'st the boon,
“ When sleep her soul embraces,
“ To softly vest her tranquil breast
“ With shadowy, shimmering laces,
“ O, bid her dream, while there you beam,
“ Nor scornfully to deem it,
“ The dream that fills and fondly thrills
“ A soul that dares not dream it.”

A tender song that greets uncultured ears
Is like the pollen of some precious flower
Consigned in eager fondness to the winds,
But wafted to a meretricious couch,
Produces but a bitter, bastard fruit:
And this, 'ere long, the plaintive singer learned;
For scarce his lips had closed, 'ere he was
hemmed,
On every side, by creatures from the pool,
Who mocked and mauled him to a sore degree:
My blood was now aroused, and striding forth,
I gained their midst, and prayed that they
would tell
What cause they had to treat the victim thus.

The glances that I met showed less surprise
 Than anger, at my entrance on the scene.
 At length one blinking fellow who, it seemed,
 Was vested with authority, stepped forth,
 And thus addressed me: "Stranger, you employ

- "Boïd language, and a bolder tone, for one
 "Who questions me, but as it is my mood
 "To speak with you, the scamp may be our
 theme.
 "Know then, that he has been suspected long
 "Of holding converse with our enemies;
 "Hence we have watched him, and his recent
 words
 "Have proved his guilt, for can it be affirmed
 "That his late jargon had a sense at all,
 "Unless it was intended to convey
 "A cryptic message to some lurking ear?
 "But if innocuous meaning can be shown,
 "By any skill or chance, to fit his words,
 "They, ne'ertheless condemn him, for 'tis clear
 "That if naught else of reason they contain,
 "This much they publish; that he has a dream.
 "Now, in this realm, to dream is to incur
 "Most painful penalty, unless the dream
 "Be well approved on the authority

“ Of ancient writ; but his, you will observe,
“ Is by his words, a dream he dares not dream,
“ And though his lines, at first sight, would im-
port
“ That 'tis a dream undreamt, such stuff involves
“ Absurdity too gross to be conceived;
“ And thus 'tis patent that the twaddling ass
“ Has dreamt already, and must be condemned.”

This bombast was delivered in a tone
 That well accorded with the words, and both
 Convinced me there was little to be gained
 By argument directed to the point;
 Yet I could not forsake the luckless wretch
 Without an effort made in his behalf;
 Therefore I said: "Good sir, I well perceive
 "That 'twere, indeed, presumptuous on my part
 "To match my wit with logic such as yours;
 "Yet it can happen that a mind astute
 "May lose the truth amid the subtleties
 "Of its invention, and I dare assert
 "That I can show a meaning to his words,
 "Devoid of the great guilt that you impute;
 "His canticle was one of love, and hence
 "Should not be harshly judged, for when the
 heart
 "Is touched by hand invisible and caused
 "To throb with silent music, can the tongue
 "Add aught but discord to th' ecstatic strain?
 "I pray you, then, let Mercy have a place
 "In your wise counsel, and your judgment
 grace."

E'en as I spoke, I noted that his rage
 Increased with every word, and when I ceased,
 His fury was, at first, too violent
 For speech, but in a moment he found voice
 For this tirade: "Why dolt! The culprit's
 verse

- "Would rank as courtly diction, if appraised
 "Beside your shallow drivel. I will pass,
 "With scarce a comment, such nugacities
 "As 'silent music'; but it grates to hear
 "Such words as 'love' and 'mercy' from your
 lips.
 "Prate not to me of these, till you can show
 "That they have any place in Nature's plan.
 "Direct your vision to the smallest drop
 "Of water that subtends the rays which pierce
 "The object glass, and there behold a world
 "Of struggling, fighting creatures, where the
 weak
 "Live only while they can evade the strong;
 "Conceive, if well you can, the constant strife
 "Beneath the wave, where myriad monsters prey
 "On lesser monsters, and in turn, yield up
 "Their own existence to some greater jaws;

“ See how the same rule holds through all the
grades
“ Of bird and beast and reptile; mark, e’en, how
“ The tree is throttled by th’ insidious vine;
“ And at the apex of this pyramid
“ Of cruelty reigns, most insatiate,
“ Tyrannical and terrible, the man,
“ Who preys on all beneath; the deep is dragged,
“ The forest searched, the farthest plain is swept
“ To gather victims for each transient whim
“ Of his voracious appetite; the lamb
“ Is wrested from the matrix to be flayed
“ To grace *Milady’s* cloak; yet unappeased
“ By these oblations, he takes up his arms
“ Against his brother, robs and cheats his kind;
“ Nay more, by folly and intemperance
“ And gluttony he hastens the decay
“ Of his own paltry body, and at last
“ The tottering, whining dotard drags the hulk
“ Before his God, and offers it in trade
“ For indissoluble felicity.
“ Then tell me by what warrant I must hear
“ Such words as ‘ love ’ and ‘ mercy ’ from your
lips.”

Oft I had pondered on this very theme,
 But never had the truth oppressed my mind
 With vividness so painful as I felt
 Beneath his tongue; then too I was depressed
 In spirit by my late experience.

What wonder, then, that this was my reply:
 "Your just rebuke, sir, to my wretched kind
 "Is doubly merited, because it falls
 "On one well qualified to testify
 "The truth of the impeachment; yet my words
 "Shall be indemnified, and you may find
 "The warrant in my death, for I resolve
 "That I no more shall be an instrument
 "Of such iniquity. One duty claims
 "That for a season I must still exist:
 "A day, or ages, since, I know not which,
 "For time forsakes my poor bewildered brain,
 "I lost my child while wandering near your
 realm;
 "Mayhap you are a parent, sir, and know
 "I cannot die till I have found my boy
 "And placed him in his mother's arms; I go
 "But to perform this service; when 'tis done
 "I shall return, and should it please your mood
 "To be my witness, I will gladly show
 "How man can free himself from Nature's
 gyves."

A burst of caustic laughter introduced
 His next invective, which continued thus:
 "Thrice muddled fool! Are you, indeed, so
 skilled
 "In knavery that you can cheat the worm?
 "Or are you purblind to the irony
 "That Nature, in this subtle farce called life,
 "Provides for her amusement? Know you not
 "That from your dust a thousand forms must
 creep
 "To struggle, suffer, generate, and die,
 "Through countless years, to form another man
 "Or different creature that may please her
 whim?
 "But let our quarrel cease: If I was harsh,
 "'Twas that you tried me with your stubborn bent
 "Against the evidence on every hand,
 "That Nature yields rewards for those alone
 "With strength and skill to take them. Brother!
 Come
 "And join our busy throng; in this great pool
 "That lies before you, glistening in the sun,
 "Much honor and much substance may be gained;
 "Your wit is ready and your shoulders broad;

“ These, with my patronage, must soon insure
“ Our mutual renown; and for a pledge
“ I grant this rogue a pardon. Brother, come
“ And wallow in the shining, yellow slough.”

His wrath had chafed me, but his sudden change
To fawning was well nigh unbearable,
And I had need of all my fortitude
To answer in this wise: "I thank you, sir,
"For your kind offer, which I must refuse;
"I have no relish for yon fulvous pond;
"Too long, already, I have tarried here;
"I must, at once, go hence to seek my child."

My pen is all too feeble to describe
The snarling cynicism of his tone
As he rejoined: "Nay, not so fast, my friend;
"Your obligations rest upon your mind
"Too lightly; surely you do not forget
"How recently you entered in my debt
"By a request which, on condition named,
"I have conceded; now the scamp has gone,
"And you would break your bond? Nay, here
you stay,
"And cool your haste, for you must join the
throng
"That delves and fights in yonder fertile pool."

My frenzy would no longer be restrained,
 And all my nerves were quivering as I cried:
 "Foul Minim! Is your moral atmosphere
 "So hopelessly impervious to a ray
 "Of sympathy that you would thwart the quest
 "Of a devoted parent for his child?
 "E'en stunted as you are, your body shames
 "Your mind. And was it you, vile Mannikin,
 "Who stripped my soul, not for the wish to heal
 "Its sad deformities, but that you craved
 "To jeer the nakedness? And was it you
 "Who would persuade me to forsake my faith
 "In the benignity of Nature's plan?
 "Know then, that you have overshot your mark;
 "For in the moment when you dragged my
 thoughts
 "Well nigh to the base level of your own,
 "You took a step too much when you essayed
 "To teach me that the endless suffering
 "Which permeates all life is a device
 "To please the fancy of some fickle God.
 "Learn, croaking pigmy, that delight in pain
 "Of others is the joy of abject minds,
 "And not the delectation of a God;
 "And there is that within me which declares
 "That I was given an existence here

“ For good. Learn, also, that when you display
“ Your total want of sympathy, you prove
“ I have what you have not; nor would I sell
“ For all the contents of your loathsome pool.
“ E'en if your words were true, and life had
 naught
“ Of purpose but to alternate with death
“ In endless round, without ulterior plan,
“ 'Twould be my wish to lay my dying hopes
“ Amid the flowers on some mountain height,
“ And linger near them, 'neath the chanting stars,
“ Where pitying winds might soothe the parting
 pangs,
“ But ne'er to cast them on the filthy scum
“ Of a detestable, polluted slough.
“ And now attend my words, for they embrace
“ The only logic that your mind can grasp:
“ If I must fight, your skull shall be the first
“ To feel my fury! Goblin, stand aside! ”

My eyes were on a bludgeon that lay near;
 But he divined my purpose, and himself
 Secured it; but to my intense surprise,
 He tossed it, with contempt, into the pond;
 Then turning to his cohorts, who stood near,
 Awaiting, with impatience, for a sign
 To seize me, he gave vent, in croaking tones,
 To this command: "Remain you where you
 stand;

"This braggart's insolence has been too great
 "For his subjection to appease my wrath,
 "Unless my own hands be the instrument
 "Of his abasement." Then, with agile bound,
 He threw himself upon me, and with hands
 That gripped like talons of some frightful bird,
 He grasped my throat; I bore him back and
 rained

A storm of blows upon his upturned face;
 But tenser, ever tenser, grew his grip,
 And weaker, ever weaker, I became.
 He noted that my strength was ebbing fast,
 And that he might the better gloat, he brought
 His face, with hideous leer, quite close to mine.
 My loathing summoned all my waning strength
 To thrust his visage from me, and in this
 My hands were guided, by some Providence,

To his o'erhanging brows, which being thus³
Pushed upward, suddenly exposed his eyes
To the full glare of the refulgent light.
I felt his grasp relax; I saw him sink,
With groan that I half pitied, to the Earth;
My senses swirled; my body swayed; the ground
Seemed to retreat beneath my trembling feet;
And " 'twas the evening of the second day."

CANTO THIRD

Dissolution ⁴

XXXI

If you have rested in some quiet nook
In a bedimmed cathedral, and have watched
The cloistered rays of light demurely stray
From some stained window, and serenely creep
The tessellated floor, until a deep
And tranquil reverie has claimed your mind,
While o'er you, inobtrusively, there stole
A trembling murmur from the organ loft
In farther chapel, whispering its way
So faintly, softly, through the columned aisles,
It seemed to find an entrance to your soul
Without the intervention of your ear,
You have been near to Peace; and you may gain
Some faint conception of my state of mind
In the first moments that my consciousness
Next claimed me; for it seemed that I could
 feel
Sweet strains of music that I did not hear.

At length my eyes unclosed, and I perceived —
 And wondered only that I wondered not —
 That I was couched upon a nebulous
 And far extending cloud that stretched away,
 With undulating surface, bathed by light
 As of some golden sunset, till my sight
 Sank with it in the deeper vistas where
 A veil ethereal was interposed
 To screen profane intrusion: this I saw
 Before I moved, but when I turned my eyes,
 My raptured vision rested on a form
 Which I, perforce, must liken unto that
 Of woman, for thus only can I give
 Some feeble portrait of its grace and charm;
 But, if I may be pardoned for the words,
 Which part my lips with reverence to her sex,
 No woman e'er could be so beautiful
 As this sweet, radiant creature. Yet my heart
 Grew heavy as I looked, for I recalled
 How despicably unfit I must be
 For such a presence; and my pain increased
 When I beheld the creature turn her steps
 Towards me, for I felt that I must give
 A warning to avoid me, and at first
 My voice could find no utterance. At length,
 In agitated accents, I called forth:

“ Fair Creature; Woman; Angel; stop, I pray,
“ Before your feet betray you to a sphere
“ That may contaminate you; for the form
“ Which greets your eyes is that of one unfit
“ Your presence to attend. I need not tell
“ The multitude of lesser stains that smirch
“ My hands, for I have reason to believe
“ That in my last, dread waking thoughts, I slew
“ A creature of my kind, and though indeed
“ Great was my provocation, 'tis a weight
“ Upon my heart, and surely I must be
“ Abominable to your saintly sight.”

- She smiled, and gliding softly to my side,
 She placed her hand upon my brow, and said
 "Beloved brother, be you comforted;
 "Naught that is vile comes here. It was your
 self,
 "Your atavistic ego, that you slew;
 "The baser self that would have dragged you
 back
 "To the deep gulf whence Nature toiled so long
 "To raise you; and because you bravely fought
 "It is my privilege to show your eyes
 "A measure of the victory you won:
 "And since your words imply that you would
 know
 "A name that may address me, be content
 "To call me sister Stella, not alone
 "In this brief interview, but through the year
 "To come, when I shall whisper to your heart
 "And you may hear me, but shall see me not.'

I answered: " Sister Stella, eagerly
" My mind has sought the deeper mysteries
" Of Truth, and something tells me that at last
" I meet with one whose words shall greet my ear
" As water greets the lips of him who faints
" For thirst; but first relieve my mind, I pray,
" Of a dread burden of another kind "—

A tremor in my voice led me to pause
To gain composure. Ere I could resume,
She said: "I know the question you would
ask:

- "Your boy is safe, and waiting, even now,
"To meet you; thus one burden is removed:
"To rid you of the other is, I fear
"Beyond my skill; for there are heights of Truth
"To which my wildest dreams may scarce aspire:
"But tell me of your trouble, and perchance
"I may, in some small measure, know the cure."

" Dear Sister," I continued, " I would know
 " That the dense veil which hangs on every side
 " Conceals the inner workings of a plan
 " Designed for good, and not a fiendish toy;
 " And I would know that, in this mystic plan,
 " I have a purpose; and I fain would find
 " How I may best perform my little part.
 " I sought in ancient tomes, and was dismissed
 " With curses, as a tainted, holden fool,
 " Because my soul rebelled at their absurd
 " And childish tyrannies; from these I turned
 " To seek an answer from Philosophy,
 " And 'neath the guidance of sage counsellors,
 " My path has only reached the fearful brink
 " Of an abyss whence I may not retreat,
 " Nor may they further guide me, for they say:
 " ' Here progress takes the final, fatal step
 " ' Into the gulf of chaos, whence it sprung;
 " ' In this Cyclopean Ganges, Nature casts
 " ' The fruits that she has labored to bring forth,
 " ' Through untold ages, from her fecund womb;
 " ' Here Evolution lets the scepter fall,
 " ' And Dissolution holds her sway supreme.' "

In tones that seemed to share the golden glow
That now fell full upon her, she replied:

"Can you, who saw a floating speck evolve,
" 'Neath Nature's hand, to creatures which
received

"The gift of feet when their persistence earned

"The right to walk, and likewise ears and eyes

"When they had striven long to hear and see —

"Can you, dear brother, doubt that, in the time

"When Nature must consign her progeny

"To that great chasm which affrights your soul,

"She will provide the pinions that may soar,

"Above its terrors, to a realm secure?

"In truth, there is no chaos; all is law

"And studied order to the Master Mind

"That rules Creation; all the Universe

"Is but a wondrous crucible in which

"All matter must, in course of time, give place

"To spirit. Evolution is the fire,

"The vivifying sacred flame that frees

"Immured reality, and gives it wings

"To pierce the ether. Dissolution's part

"Is but redistribution of the dross

"In combinations new, to be again,

"And yet again, subjected to the flame,

"Till the conversion of the final grain."

XXXVIII

I answered: " Sister of my soul, your words
 " Are deep and wondrous to my blunted ears;
 " But something of their import I can grasp
 " When I recall that 'neath the tutelage
 " Of one great Earthly teacher, I have learned
 " That all the objects that confront my eyes
 " Are but the symbols of Reality; ⁵
 " And that a subtile, everlasting force
 " Pervades all matter. If I comprehend
 " Your meaning, 'tis this great persisting force
 " Which finds an exit o'er the altar's flame; ⁶
 " But tell me of the part that I perform
 " In this transfiguration, for my hands
 " Now tremble lest they blunder in their work."

A smile seraphic lit her countenance
 As she continued: " Brother, can it be
 " That you have traced, through atom, Earth and
 star,
 " This principle of a persistent force,
 " And recognize it not when it appears
 " In your own consciousness? If it is true
 " That force persistent is a principle
 " Which permeates all Nature, can the part
 " That streams through your own consciousness
 be lost?
 " Your office in Creation, then, is this:
 " Through consciousness alone can force forsake
 " Material environment, and rise
 " To realms of spirit; ⁷ thus your consciousness
 " Is but the wedding of subjective force
 " With force objective; but the subtile fruit
 " Of this espousal seeks th' omniscient sea
 " The moment of its birth, and hence to you
 " Seems evanescent, though it truly lives
 " As part of that great spiritual flood
 " Which surges onward through eternity.
 " And since a symbol only can exist
 " By virtue of the substance symbolized,
 " When all Reality finds mansions new,
 " The old shall crumble to nihility." ⁸

I further queried: "Sister, if it be
"The plan of Nature thus to rid herself
"Of ponderable attributes, was not
"The transformation feasible without
"The pain enormous that has been prescribed
"In the creation of the instrument?
"And does she reckon so highly of the change
"That she would e'en preserve the agony
"Of the expiring fawn and the fierce lust
"Of the destroying huntsman who makes haste
"To gloat upon the issue of his aim,
"The raptor's baleful passion and the throes
"Of his unhappy victim, the depraved,
"Pernicious cunning of the mountebank?
"If these indeed must evermore survive,
"As shuddering waves upon a conscious sea,
"O! What a curse is immortality!"

The golden light was fading, and perhaps
 It was the deeper purple which suffused
 Her cheek that made me fancy that I saw
 A shade of sadness pass across her face
 At mention of the word of pain; and yet
 The same sweet smile preceded this reply:
 " Dear brother, by your words you make me fear
 " That something of my meaning has been lost;
 " And I must hasten, if I would correct
 " The error, for when yonder light departs,
 " 'Twill be my summons to another sphere
 " Of duty. Brother, try to rid yourself
 " Of the vagaries that betray the thought
 " Of him who would confuse mere nothingness
 " With spirit; and your mind will then be free
 " To think of spirit as another form,
 " No less substantial though 'tis unrevealed,
 " Of that same force which manifests itself
 " In matter; ⁹ this prepares you to conceive
 " That though imponderable it may be
 " To human scales, it may, indeed, be weighed
 " In the just balance of Infinity,
 " And has degrees in its tenuity;
 " And granite blocks might float upon the sea
 " More easily than hate or selfishness
 " Upon the ether; these, indeed, must fall

“ And feel, again, the purifying flame.
“ The rest is clear: pain, only, can give birth
“ To sympathy; 'tis only sympathy
“ That can expand to love; 'tis only love
“ That e'er can hope to reach the heights sublime
“ Where truth, revealed in all her beauty, grants
“ Felicitous communion with her soul.
“ Dear brother, I must go, but 'ere we part,
“ My lyre shall, a moment, lull your heart.”

She drew a lyre from her flowing robe,
And as her fingers lightly swept the strings,
There came a weirdly beautiful response,
In wild and broken rhythm that, at first,
Pursued each perturbation of my mind
Until it seemed to seize upon my soul;
Then gently, imperceptibly, it led
Into a crooning melody; the lids
Drooped o'er my eyes; the music died away
To a faint whisper; like a weary child
I raised my arms; it may have been the cloud
That touched my forehead; and I slept again.

CANTO FOURTH

The Reunion

XLIII

I next unclosed my eyes to see
The bright, green sward, the fallen tree,
The scattered crumbs, that showed where last
My child had joined me in repast.
But how can I express the joy
I felt when I beheld the boy
Emerging from the woody glen;
Or when my eager arms again
His form encircled? When my heart
Could bear him a slight space apart,
I heard him artlessly narrate
His story, which I thus restate:

“ Why, father, when I sang the song
“ And poured the water, a great throng
“ Of wicked, little men appeared
“ And tried to catch me, and I feared
“ They would, for though my feet ran fast,
“ They gained upon me; but at last
“ A lovely lady seemed to rise
“ Just in my path, and when her eyes
“ Looked on the dwarfs, I saw that they
“ Grew much afraid, and ran away.
“ Then when I cried, she dried my tears
“ And held me until all my fears
“ Had vanished, and beneath some charm,
“ I fell asleep upon her arm.
“ When I awoke, she brought me near,
“ And showed the path that led me here.”

O! Spirit of Poesy, scarce may I raise
My glance to solicit a token of praise,
As now to thy favor I humbly consign
This tribute unworthy to lay at thy shrine:
Yet great my reward, if but one yearning heart
Be touched by a faith, that my song may impart,
In that distant day when thy lute shall awake
With harmony meet for thine ear to partake;
When fingers supernal shall stray o'er its
strings,
With exquisite touch, till the Universe rings
In one great, ecstatic, mellifluous chord,
With cadence that melts in the voice of the
Lord.



NOTES



NOTES

¹ The word "dwarfish" and its synonyms are all words of such elastic meaning that the author has not found any one word precisely suited to the meaning that he would convey by this word as it appears in the text, and therefore finds it expedient to resort to a note on this point. The reader is requested to frame the idea, not of creatures of Lilliputian stature; nor even of those unfortunate and extremely rare specimens of humanity who are of such diminutive size as to pass under the appellation "freaks"; but of that less rare class to be met with in the ordinary avocations of human life, whose stature is stunted to a degree sufficient only to excite passing comment. This will be found necessary in the reading of stanza XXX, in order to give an idea of approximate equality in strength to the contestants in the combat there mentioned. With this in mind, it need hardly be added that the words "Minim," "pigmy," &c., appearing in stanza XXIX, are to be read as opprobrious epithets hurled at the moral, rather than at the physical, littleness of the dwarf addressed in that stanza.

² This form of the word, although possibly archaic, suggests itself to the author as more appropriate to the sense in which it is here used than the more common spelling.

³ Note description of the overhanging brows of the dwarfs, in stanza XI.

⁴ He who has read the "Synthetic Philosophy" of Mr. Herbert Spencer need scarcely be told that most of

the allusions to the teachings of philosophy, appearing in this section, have reference to that great work. The whole poem was, in fact, undertaken with the view of showing what Mr. Spencer has himself repeatedly intimated; that the theory of evolution is not incompatible with a faith in a benign plan of creation.

⁵ Spencer's First Principles — Chap. xxiv, Sec. 194.

⁶ . . . "by the indestructibility of Matter, we really mean the indestructibility of the *force* with which matter affects us." First Principles — Chap. iv, Sec. 54.

⁷ Some hint of this was suggested to the author by the reading of Sec. 71c, Chap. VIII, of the work already mentioned; and it is only one of several beautiful hypotheses that might be raised on the foundation of the hint thus afforded.

Read, also, Chapters 16, 17, 18 and 19 of the General Analysis, Vol. II, Principles of Psychology.

⁸ This is, of course, a proposition of the class that admits of no concrete conception. If the ability to form a concrete conception be accepted as the ultimate criterion of the legitimate bounds of philosophic speculation, it may be doubted whether the "Transfigured Realism" of Mr. Spencer is, itself, rested on a legitimate foundation, to say nothing of the many other systems of philosophy that have claimed the attention of the thinking world. It is needless, however, to enter into such a question. If such a criticism should be raised, it would be sufficient answer to say that the work of the author is intended as a poem, and not as a formal treatise on philosophy; and this, alone, is sufficient license for the author to enter into realms of

speculation that are denied to the writer who treats the subject from a demonstrable, or semi-demonstrable, standpoint. In fact, this license is admitted by the great philosopher, himself, when he says: "The momentum of thought carries us beyond conditioned existence to unconditioned existence; and this ever persists in us as the body of a thought to which we can give no shape." *First Principles*, Chap. 4, Sec. 26.

⁹ This, the author believes, is in full harmony with the theory of Transfigured Realism.

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